

## **COMBINED ARMS RESPONSE TO INTERIM CHARGE 5**

***Review the connection between the economic vitality of business and industry and the economic vitality of our military veterans transitioning into the workforce. Specifically, the committee should analyze barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life, the effectiveness of government transition and training benefits, and current and ongoing demand for veteran and military spouse employment from industry in Texas.***

*(Joint charge with the House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs)*

Service members encounter a series of needs as they transition out of the military. These include securing employment and housing, addressing physical or mental health issues and adjusting to civilian culture. The ease through which this transition is made has a profound impact on post-service well-being (Castro, 2013). Two studies on veteran transition and reintegration produced similar findings that highlighted several important social problems: veterans were unprepared for transition, singular organizations or agencies cannot meet the needs of veterans by themselves, the social services landscape is highly fragmented, and that data is not consistent or shared across organizations (Tristate Veterans Community Alliance Report, 2014). Combined Arms was designed specifically to combat these social problems at the community-level through our centralized co-working space, collaborative work with our member organizations, our integrated technology platform, and our community leader program design.

Additionally, Combined Arms has developed and implemented an innovative awareness campaign that attracts military families to Texas as a means of economic development and to ensure our 80+ member organizations are able to connect them to the 450+ resources available further upstream in the transition



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process before they leave active duty, which saves time, resources, and ensures a faster and more successful reintegration in most cases.

Government transition programs are an important tool for service members as they leave the military. However, training these service members about the many community-based organizations available to them once they transition out of the military, may be overlooked. A holistic approach for veterans and their families is vital to ensuring each individual's success. Combined Arms has partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission's Texas Veteran Leadership Program Veteran Resource and Referral Specialists to compliment their career services and provide other resources as needed for the veteran. Additionally, when a transitioning service member, veteran, or family member takes an assessment for services online (combinedarms.us), the client is only referred to the organization they **qualify for**. This helps cut through the noise and confusion that many feel as they research the many resources available to them. Combined Arms gives the client peace of mind in knowing the organization they are referred to is best-in-class because we have vetted each member organization through a due diligence process created for us by KPMG. Each organization is also held accountable to a 96-hour **maximum** response time once a client is connected to them, ensuring no veteran is left behind or falls through the cracks.

Across all requests, career services are far and away the number one requested service among Combined Arms's clients. When transitioning to civilian life, servicemembers must translate their military experience into civilian terms in order to portray their ability to perform essential job functions. Many veterans report this "translation" as a significant barrier to employment (Prudential, 2012). At Combined Arms, we have organizations solving this problem daily, and connecting the transitioning service member, veteran, or family member to additional resources available to them. Among the community based organizations and state/federal agencies offering career services in our platform, the specific resources include: resume writing, interview preparation, career search and placement,



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entrepreneurship, career mentoring, professional attire, LinkedIn assistance, internship opportunities, transition workshops, professional networking and development, and second chance job placement. Another vital aspect of career placement includes private sector relationships with corporations willing and able to place veterans and military spouses into meaningful careers. Veteran and military spouse hiring initiatives are impactful for both the employee and employer when corporate partners recognize the unparalleled loyalty, experience, and leadership abilities seen in veteran employees. Combined Arms is diligent in partnering only with employment organizations/agencies that place veterans into careers with a livable wage. During the assessment portion, clients are asked to note if they have a spouse and how many children under the age of 18 are living in their home. This information helps place the client in a career that will keep them well above the poverty line. In 2019 alone, our member organizations placed 1,000+ veterans into careers with a median starting salary of \$60,050, and 15 military spouses into careers with a median starting salary of \$51,770.

In conclusion, it is clear that veteran and military spouse employment is key to the economic development of the State of Texas. Currently, Texas is second only to California in the number of veteran residents with the states expecting to switch places in the coming years. As more veterans decide to call Texas home (or choosing to stay here), it is imperative that our resources and services become more easily accessible and available to make the transition to civilian life easier and more efficient. Combined Arms recently received support from the Texas Workforce Commission, and we have begun serving Houston, Austin, El Paso, Dallas/Fort Worth, and rural Texas. This project, the Texas Veterans Network, will make Texas the first interconnected state for veterans in America.